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Viewing cable 09RIYADH42, DAY AND NIGHT: SAUDI SHI'A SHARE GEOGRAPHY, BUT

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09RIYADH42**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09RIYADH42	2009-01-07 16:33	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET//NOFORN	Embassy Riyadh

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/22/116306/wikileaks-saudi-crackdown-on-shiites.html>

VZCZCXRO1534
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHRH #0042/01 0071633
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 071633Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9777
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZJ/HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHIC/ORG OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 9961

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000042

NOFORN
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP (HARRIS, BLONG) AND DRL/NESCA
(HICKEY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: DAY AND NIGHT: SAUDI SHI'A SHARE GEOGRAPHY, BUT
NOT OPINIONS

REF: RIYADH 1868

RIYADH 00000042 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: DCM David Rundell
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

KEY POINTS

-- (U) Our recent meetings with Saudi Arabia's Shi'a groups in the Eastern Province (EP) revealed divergent attitudes toward their country.

-- (U) Mainstream Shi'a, including municipal council members, identify themselves as Saudis first and Shi'a second.

-- (U) Elsewhere, Hizballah's messages find fertile ground among younger Shi'a, frustrated by religious and economic discrimination. They openly criticize the government and identify themselves as Shi'a first. The same group acknowledge that today they have more employment opportunities at Aramco than they had ten years ago.

-- (C) Signs of sympathy toward Hizballah among some EP Shi'a include recent street demonstrations and the open display of Hizballah flags and posters.

COMMENT

(C) The meetings described below revealed stark contrasts in individual Shi'a worldviews. Many established Shi'a citizens consider themselves loyal Saudis and work within existing institutions to better their lot, running businesses and serving on the municipal council. In their midst exists a growing network of younger, more vocal Shi'a who harbor greater anti-government resentments. They are Shi'a first, Saudi second. This population's loyalty is up for grabs, and Hizballah's messages resonate with them. Their response to Hassan Nasrallah's calls to protest Israel's attacks on Gaza was evidenced by two demonstrations in eleven days in Qatif.

End Key Points and Comment

A DAYTIME VISIT TO QATIF

11. (C) MEETING CIVIC LEADERS. A large contingent of Shi'a leaders hosted Dhahran Consul General Kenny December 21 in Qatif, seizing the opportunity to impart varied agendas and points of view. Qatif municipal council chairman Jafar M. Al-Shayab (protect) opened the meeting. He proudly described the community's involvement with the council, which he estimated represents a population of 180,000. Al-Shayab requested from the Consulate more speakers and visitor exchanges, hoping to send people to the U.S. "to speak about the situation here."

12. (C) EXPLAINING IRAN. Shi'a activist and writer Dr. Tawfiq al-Saif chronicled recent historical events and their impact on Eastern Province (EP) Shi'a. He described Shi'ite Islam as a "passive school" until Iran's Islamic revolution and the U.S. invasion of Iraq. He noted that Saudi Shi'a were "deeply affected by what happened in Iraq." Al-Saif described Iranians as "conspiracy theorists" who view the world as unfriendly, remembering invasions from all sides throughout their history.

13. (C) SAUDI CITIZEN FIRST, SHI'A SECOND. Al-Saif posed a hypothetical question: Where would Saudi Shi'a stand if the U.S. invaded Iran? He noted that Saudi Shi'a used to consider Iran "a paradise." Then, they were permitted to

travel there. Opinions changed. Religion aside, Al-Saif said his fellow Shi'a found their day-to-day life in the Kingdom much better than in Iran, and the travel actually strengthened their identity as Saudis. He described Saudi Shi'a now as more calculating about where to align themselves. "No more dogma," he added. Prior to our departure, the CG promised to continue this dialogue in future meetings of this nature.

ONE NIGHT IN SAFWA

14. (C) SMELLS LIKE SOUTH LEBANON. Further north along the coastal oasis, in the majority-Shi'a community of Safwa, Emboffs paid a nighttime visit to a group of five younger Shi'a at the home of XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect). XXXXXXXXXXXX brother lives in the U.S. and founded the XXXXXXXXXXXX, formerly the XXXXXXXXXXXX. Safwa, like Qatif, lacks the smartly developed infrastructure of Riyadh or even Dhahran, with narrower streets and modest homes. Al-Ahmed's spartan sitting area boasted two photos of Nasrallah hung in one corner and three rifles propped in another. Upon Emboffs arrival, XXXXXXXXXXXX called together a group of colleagues who more openly shared the frustrations of EP Shi'a.

15. (C) RELIGIOUS MINORITY. In a free-ranging discussion, this younger group attributed their economic marginalization to religious discrimination. In one of several examples, a medical student in the group described his ejection from a shopping center mosque, where he was called "kafir" (unbeliever) and told to leave. "Why should I support the government when I am treated like this?" he asked. Nevertheless, they characterized EP Shi'a as able to distinguish between religion and politics. Though they may look to Ayatollah Khamenei in Iran, Ali al-Sistani in Iraq or Mohammed Fadlallah in Lebanon for their religious guidance, many of the youth in particular look to Hezbollah as their political voice.

16. (S/NF) ARRESTS, DETENTIONS. XXXXXXXXXXXX (protect) shared that he currently knew ten people who were being held in prison, indefinitely, without charge or trial. He matter-of-factly described his own detention in detail. He revisited his experiences from 1996, when authorities arrested him following the al-Khobar bombings, detaining him for three years. XXXXXXXXXXXX recalled interrogations and harsh conditions, held in a small, unventilated cell and subjected to prolonged periods in stress positions. Returning to current events, the group confirmed the December 19 Qatif demonstration (Reftel). To their knowledge, authorities arrested at least six protesters in the days following the demonstration. (Note: In the week following this meeting, sources reported that the number of arrests stemming from the December 19 demonstration had increased to ten or more, including Kamal al-Ahmed. End note.)

17. (C/NF) THE "50/50 PRINCE." While no love is lost toward the Saudi government or the al-Saud, the group showed respect for the King. They instead blamed the "Wahhabis" who they claimed infiltrate the universities. They directed their true ire at EP Governor Prince Mohamed bin Fahd (MBF). Any new business, they claimed, will quickly learn that it must pay half of its profits to MBF. Refusal will result in eventual closure of the business. This allegedly impacts many Aramco suppliers. As a result, locals have nicknamed MBF "the Fifty-Fifty Prince." The fifty percent proportion is likely exaggeration for effect, but the comment reflects a belief among EP Shi'a that corruption is a significant issue in the province. This group remains acutely aware of economic imbalances in the Kingdom, observing that in EP they are "stepping in oil" but very few reap the benefit.

18. (C) SAUDI ARAMCO CONNECTION. At least three of the group identified themselves as Aramco employees, which they say drives employment for most of Safwa. They claimed that ten years ago a position at Aramco would not have been open to

Shi'a. Those present on this night represented the
blue-collar portion of the workforce, with the position title
of "operator."

FRAKER